

Overhead cabinets mark the transition from kitchen to breakfast area. (Opposite) Porches, balconies, and recesses create a sequence of sheltered outdoor spaces.



With two co-authors of *A Pattern Language* among its three principals, the Berkeley, Calif., architecture firm Jacobson Silverstein Winslow has long attracted clients who are fans of the book. Few, however, have been as familiar with the work as the owners of this Northern California country home. "They knew this book very, very well," says architect Max Jacobson. In defining their desires for their new house, he remembers, "It's like they said, 'This book is what we want.'" The couple was even more familiar with the site, which they had owned and camped on for more than a decade. The combination led to a design that is remarkably attuned to both the land and the people for whom it was built. ■ Strung along the wooded edge of a meadow,



the house spreads to take in the dramatic view and to shape livable outdoor areas. "It's very nice to be in those spaces, because you're surrounded by building," Jacobson says. "You're held in the palm of the hand of this building." The building's edges are defined by the galleries,

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porches, and deep, useful balconies extolled in *A Pattern Language*. "They are places to live outside the building," Jacobson says. ■ And while porches offer shelter at the outside, a multitude of nooks, alcoves, and window seats serve the same function within, creating intimate spaces at the edges of larger rooms. ■ Due to the owners' deep involvement with the project, Jacobson says, few things about the finished house took them by surprise. "They knew the

especially alive, and buttressed with extensive references to social science research, the book makes a run at answering the most fundamental question in construction: What makes a good building?

More than 20 years after the book's publication, some of the patterns, such as South Facing Outdoors, now seem self-evident. Others, such as Farmhouse Kitchen, have been incorporated into the mainstream of custom building (in this case as the great room). Still others, such as Site Repair—the concept of building on the worst part of a site in order to leave the best spots intact—stand as ideals for designers to aspire to.

Rick Schwolsky, now editor of HANLEY-WOOD'S TOOLS OF THE TRADE magazine, encountered Alexander's work when he was a custom builder in Vermont. "I came across *A Pattern Language* at a time in my building career when I was trying to move into design/build," he says. Handed the book by an architect friend, Schwolsky remembers responding immediately. "It puts into words what people who are designing or building have a sense of intuitively," he says. "It's like he cracked the code."

Schwolsky later attended a week-long workshop with Alexander, where he was exposed to some of the thinking behind the book. "Where he came from was trying to get us to believe, which I do, that good design is not subjective," he says. It responds, in Schwolsky's words, to "humble human needs. I don't think that building design has to be a

With its meandering run and extended landing, the stair is designed to be experienced rather than simply used. (Opposite) The beam layout above helps define spaces in the large, open living area.

